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ABSTRACT

Effective-schools researchers have identified factors that are correlated with improved school achievement. School districts and state departments of education have applied this research to school improvement frameworks. This paper describes how Effective Schools Research was employed to develop a questionnaire to assess school staff perceptions of 7 effective school components in 16 high and low performing elementary schools in high poverty environments. The components were: (1) clear school mission; (2) frequent monitoring of student progress; (3) safe and orderly environment; (4) high expectations; (5) opportunity to learn and time on task; (6) instructional leadership; and (7) home/school relations. The difference in instructional staff ratings from high and low performing schools was statistically significant for each of the components. Recommendations are provided for the utilization of questionnaire results along with other data to provide a comprehensive needs assessment that would result in school improvement. Three tables and two figures illustrate data. Appendixes list effective schools correlates, sample characteristics, and the survey. (Contains 5 references.) (Author/SLD)

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STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL COMPONENTS AS A MEANS TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Florida Educational Research Association
November 10, 1994

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STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL COMPONENTS AS A MEANS TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Effective schools researchers have identified factors that are correlated with improved school achievement. School districts and state departments of education have applied this research to school improvement frameworks. This paper describes how Effective Schools Research was employed to develop a questionnaire to assess school staff perceptions of seven effective school components in 16 high and low performing elementary schools in high poverty environments. The difference in instructional staff ratings from high and low performing schools were statistically significant for each of the components. Recommendations are provided for the utilization of questionnaire results along with other data to provide a comprehensive needs assessment that would result in school improvement.

The authors wish to acknowledge the Steering Committee of the Successful Schools Study from the Florida Chapter 1 Evaluation Advisory Committee for their role in the development of this survey instrument.

STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL COMPONENTS AS A MEANS TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

Effective schools researchers have consistently identified five to seven factors that are correlated with improved school achievement (Good and Brophy, 1986; Purkey and Smith, 1983). These factors include a sense of mission, strong building leadership, high expectations for students and staff, frequent monitoring of student progress, a positive and orderly learning environment, sufficient opportunity for learning, and parent/community involvement.

Several school districts and state departments of education have applied this research over the last ten years to school improvement frameworks. Developmental work by the Connecticut Department of Education (Villanova and Shoemaker, 1981) led to survey instruments and interview protocols that allowed description of the levels of these components and subsequent plans for school improvement. San Diego County Public Schools (Chrispeels and Meaney, 1988) built on the Connecticut research and developed a district-wide school improvement process that included four steps:

1. Helping the staff see the need for change,
2. Gaining consensus on the school improvement strategies,
3. Establishing a process for facilitating and adapting the improvement strategies, and
4. Evaluating results and institutionalizing changes.

Included in this improvement process were instruments for gathering staff and parent perceptions about the status of their school in relation to the factors that comprise an effective school.

Although there were several frameworks describing the components of an effective school, the San Diego County Public Schools' definition of the seven correlates of Clear School Mission, Frequent Monitoring, Safe and Orderly Environment, High Expectations, Opportunity to Learn/Time on Task, Instructional Leadership, and Home/School Relations was adopted for this study. These definitions are included as Appendix A.

DATA SOURCE AND METHOD

The population for this study consisted of Florida Chapter 1 schools that serve children in high poverty environments, i.e., 75% or more of the school's students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. In collaboration with the Florida Department of Education, a sample of 16 schools was selected that represented a range of student outcomes. Both high and low performing schools were selected in the sample to form a group of eight high performing and eight low performing schools that served students in high poverty environments.

These 16 schools were located in six school districts from the panhandle of the state to the southern tip. They represented both urban and rural schools, high concentrations of migrant students, and a range of other characteristics. Staff questionnaires from the Connecticut Department of Education and the San Diego Public Schools were judged by a committee of practitioners as being valid for this project. Items for elementary school staff were modified where necessary to reflect instructional practices that were not included when the San Diego and Connecticut questionnaires were developed.

Chapter 1 evaluators in each district administered the questionnaires in each school to all staff and collected all completed surveys. A total of 829 staff questionnaires were analyzed. A descriptive breakdown of the respondents is included as Appendix B. A 74-item questionnaire, included as Appendix C, was developed with the following estimates of reliability and validity:

Table 1: Internal Reliability and Predictive Validity of Effective School Components

	Reliability[1]	Predictive Validity[2]
Clear School Mission: 9 Items	.84	.36
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress: 5 Items	.82	.30
Safe and Orderly Environment: 13 Items	.93	.56
High Expectations: 11 Items	.86	.47
Opportunity to Learn: 12 Items	.86	.40
Instructional Leadership: 11 Items	.93	.39
Home/School Relationships: 13 Items	.86	.32
Total: 74 Items	.97	.49

[1] Reliability was determined on the basis of Cronbach's alpha.
[2] Validity was based on the correlation between subscales and achievement in pilot project schools.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Multivariate analysis of variance test results showed that there were statistically significant differences $F(7,700)=34.06$; $p=.0001$ between all component scores in the two groups of schools. However, a ranking of t values showed that the Safe and Orderly Environment component accounted for the strongest difference between high and low performing schools. Instructional Leadership and High Expectations were the second and third largest difference between the higher and lower performing schools.

Table 2: Results of the Staff Questionnaire

	Rank	t*
Clear School Mission	5	7.99
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress	7	6.04
Safe and Orderly Environment	1	18.00
High Expectations	3	10.09
Opportunity to Learn	6	7.35
Instructional Leadership	2	10.41
Home/School Relationships	4	8.19
Total		11.54

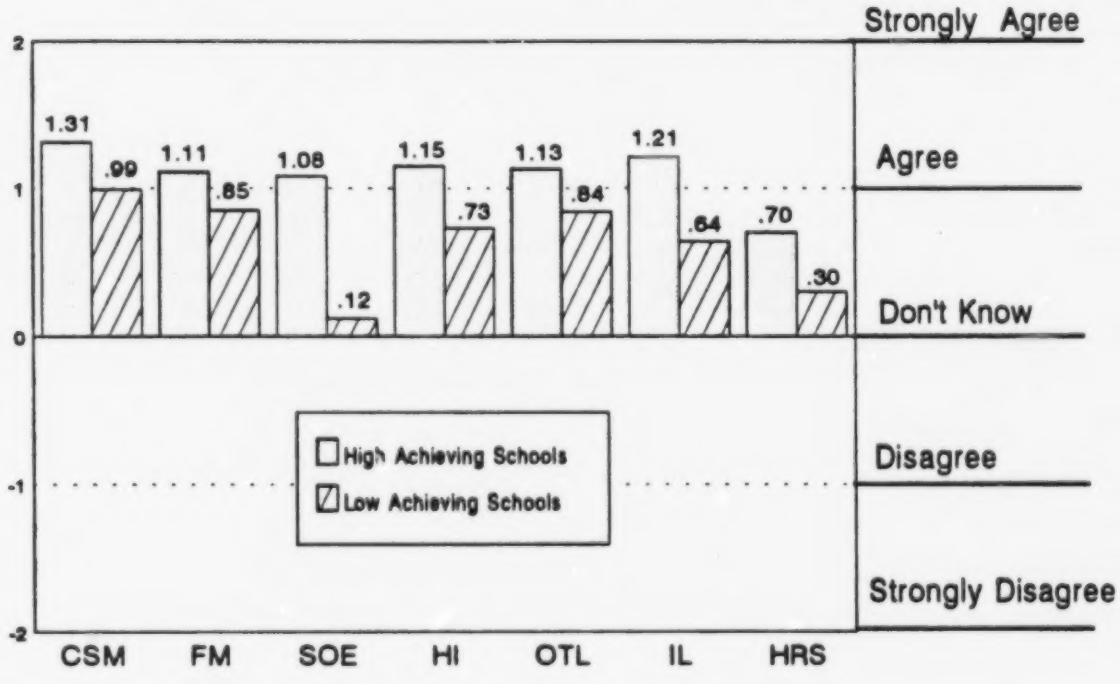
(* All differences between means were statistically significant; $p=.0001$)

Since the Safe and Orderly Environment component accounted for the strongest difference between the two groups of schools, item data were reviewed to provide details. Item data indicated that staff perceive that students do not treat each other with respect and that students are subject to verbal and physical abuse by other students. In addition, staff reported that they do feel safe during school hours.

Comparison between Groups of High and Low Achieving Schools

As further analysis, Figure 1 shows score differences between the eight schools that were selected for high achievement and the eight schools that were selected for low achievement. These group results profile the differences for each effective school component that staff reported on the questionnaire. Scores are based on a five-point scale of -2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree) with a mid-point of 0 (don't know). As the score approached the upper/positive range of values, it signified that staff agreed that this component was present in their school. Conversely, as the component total score approached the lower/negative range of values, it indicated that staff perceived that a component was missing in their school. A score that was around 0 indicated that staff had no predominate perception about the component.

Figure 1: Component Differences Between Groups of Schools



As reported earlier, the greatest difference is in the Safe and Orderly Environment component. Conversely, Figure 1 shows that even when schools from high poverty environments were selected to represent different performance levels of student achievement, staff perceptions are similar in the Clear School Mission component.

Results of the Staff Survey for the 16 Schools

Results, on same five-point scale described for Figure 1, for the 16 schools across the seven effective school components were as follows:

Table 3: Effective School Component Scores for the 16 Schools

School	CSM	FM	SOE	HI	OTL	IL	HSR	Total
A	1.45	1.32	1.11	1.37	1.29	1.28	.82	1.20
B	1.54	1.23	1.15	1.32	1.37	1.35	.76	1.24
C	1.48	1.38	1.23	1.34	1.28	1.53	.92	1.33
D	1.12	.83	.65	.81	.97	.87	.51	.74
E	1.18	.98	1.26	1.08	1.04	1.18	.50	1.02
F	1.19	.93	.97	.99	.98	1.11	.61	1.00
G	1.41	1.47	1.10	1.30	1.35	1.53	.26	1.16
H	1.22	1.06	.99	1.06	.97	1.03	.78	1.00
I	1.01	.89	-.24	.74	.85	.55	.15	.54
J	1.42	1.39	.98	1.25	1.34	1.46	.88	1.21
K	1.00	.76	.43	.84	.99	.41	.27	.65
L	.85	.67	-.53	.43	.66	.06	-.18	.20
M	.47	.84	.88	.99	.86	.81	.53	.85
N	.56	.52	-.13	.47	.63	.41	.25	.35
O	.98	.83	-.12	.64	.92	.73	.08	.57
P	1.19	.99	-.05	.68	.77	.73	.48	.57

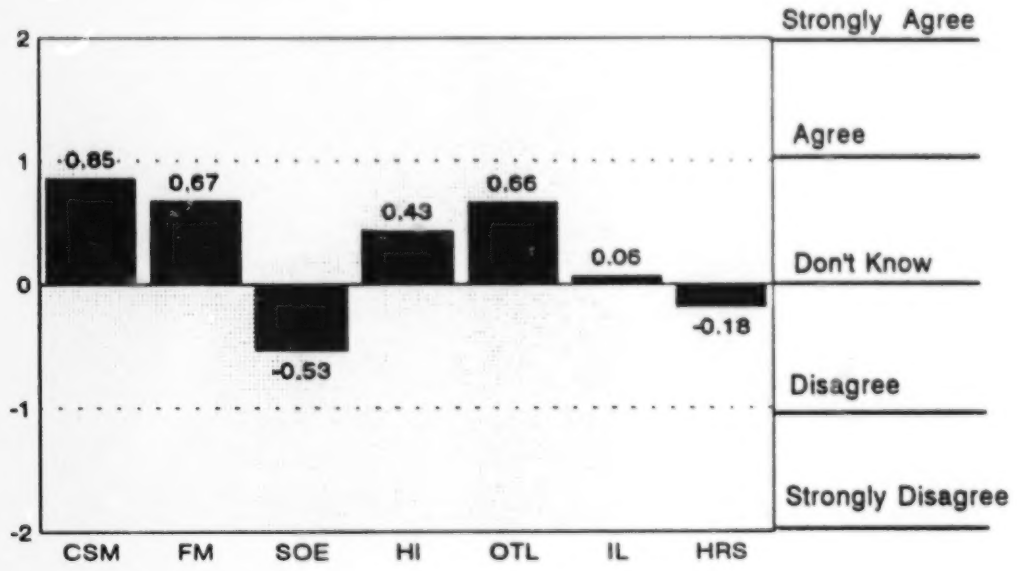
Results A-H were for high performing schools and I-P were for low performing schools. Comparing these two groupings in general, total scores were similar in the range of values (e.g., A-H > 1 and I - P < 1) with the exception of schools D and J. This could be a result of school selection that used performance data from a school year prior to staff survey results.

Prior reported results showed that the Safe and Orderly Environment component described the strongest difference between high and low performing schools. Reviewing the column of scores for this component, differences between the two groupings of schools can be observed. Although schools D, J, and M do not fit well into the pattern that is established by the other schools in the two groupings, scores A-H are higher than scores I-P.

Across both high and low achieving schools the Home/School Relationships component was generally rated as the weakest component. In the five schools (I, L, N, O, and P) where the Safe and Orderly Environment was a negative score, the Home/School Relationship score was second lowest of the seven components.

Another way to view the results is to look at a profile of an individual school. For example, the profile of school L would look as follows:

Figure 2: Individual School Profile of Effective School Components



Each of the seven components are represented in a manner that allows individuals to see how staff perceive overall building effects. If this information were considered with other data in a comprehensive needs assessment, this profile should target interventions towards improving the Safe and Orderly Environment, Home/School Relationships, and Instructional Leadership. Item data for this school should clarify issues within each of the three identified components and assist individuals to target appropriate strategies.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The authors feel that findings from this study form a reasonable basis on which to build a school reform and improvement process in Chapter 1 schools. Staff perceptions about the status of these effective school components in their school are an important consideration in developing a comprehensive needs assessment that can serve as the basis for improving that school. Results show that there are clear differences in staff perceptions between higher and lower achieving schools that serve children in high poverty environments. However, it is recommended that results from a staff questionnaire be used in a criterion-referenced approach in which progress is judged by a school's movement from an initial point in time, rather than a norm-referenced approach in which progress is judged in comparison to an external standard set by other schools.

Results should not compare schools with each other. If information about the status of a school were used to judge rather than assist staff in their efforts to improve their school, little comprehensive improvement should be expected. Developing an environment of trust is important to support the risk-taking that leads to school improvement. If staff perceive that information is used in a punitive manner, truthful responses about the school will not be given even though an instrument exists to accurately describe components of school effectiveness.

The Connecticut Department of Education has more than a decade of involvement with facilitating the school improvement process and was a primary source of instruments for this study. Their perspective on the real impact of using staff perceptions as reported in this study is to focus on the individual school and the improvement that occurs relative to where the school starts. As Joan Shoemaker (personal correspondence, September 17, 1993) points out as a concern for using survey information in the school improvement process:

> We NEVER share a school's data with anyone else, including the central office. The instrument [effective school survey] has had widespread use throughout the country and we continue to caution users that the instrument has validity ONLY when teachers are assured that their responses will contribute to a school planning process for improvement; when their responses will not be made public; when their responses will not be used for evaluation purposes and when their responses will not be compared to those of other schools.

Utilizing needs assessment data that includes staff survey results and providing the technical assistance to develop an action plan for improvement of an individual school are keys to school reform.

A limitation to this study is that findings are correlational and not causal. Being able to accurately describe the components of effective schools does not mean that one is able to describe how schools are able to become effective. Terms such as Safe and Orderly Environment are vague even with the content descriptors that are being used in this study. The correlates of an effective school are open to different interpretations by different people. The school improvement process or how schools become more effective is an area of further research.

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Appendix A: EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS CORRELATES

Definition of Terms and Importance to School Improvement As Developed by the San Diego County Schools

1. Clear School Mission (CSM)

   Effective schools have clearly articulated mission statements that have an academic focus. Mission statements convey high expectations, explain what students are to learn, and emphasize mastery of skills. To be effective in serving as the focal point for a school improvement planning process, the mission must be communicated to all school staff, students, and parents. The mission and school goals are implemented through detailed objectives and expectancies for each grade level and course area, and include the necessary instructional materials and a process for curriculum alignment.

2. Frequent Monitoring (FM)

   Effective schools frequently assess student progress and the effectiveness of school programs. Teachers inform students and their parents about progress in achieving school objectives and mastery of course content. The assessment information is used to improve the program and to alter teaching strategies when necessary. Staff in effective schools make sure there is congruence between the objectives of the school's curriculum, what teachers are actually teaching, and the tests that are used to assess the program.

3. Safe and Orderly Learning Environment (SOE)

   In effective schools, the school climate is safe and orderly with all parties engaged in purposeful activities that are learning-related. A productive learning climate is created through a schoolwide discipline code, mutually agreed to by staff, students, and parents. The discipline code carefully spells out expected student conduct and consequences for misbehavior and is enforced consistently by staff and administration. Students are given regular and frequent recognition for good behavior and encouragement and support for improving behavior. In addition to positive discipline policies, effective schools ensure that the school campus is attractive and well-kept by staff, students, and parents. A positive spirit permeates the school, and extensive efforts are made to give recognition to students' work and achievements.

4. High Expectations (HE)

   Research in effective schools supports the fact that when the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can obtain mastery of skills taught, achievement is higher. Teachers believe that it is their efforts that cause students to achieve such mastery. The school is organized in accordance with the belief that all students can learn the basic and essential skills contained within the curriculum. An effective school uses heterogeneous groupings, direct instruction, peer tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and team learning to ensure that all students are mastering the intended curriculum. Students and staff regularly celebrate learning and achievement through displays of student and staff work, awards assemblies, and other public acknowledgements of accomplishments in academics, citizenship, extracurricular activities, governance, and service.

5. Opportunity to Learn and Time on Task (OTL)

Time is a critical resource in the learning process, and in effective schools it is used efficiently through well-designed classroom operating procedures and interactive learning activities. Adequate time is allocated for essential and basic skills instruction in reading, language arts, and math at the elementary grades, and there is integration of basic skills instruction into other content areas in ways that develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. Teachers are trained in techniques that provide students with equal opportunities to respond, that meet the needs of a variety of learning styles, and that enable students to be successful with their work. Homework is regularly assigned as a way of extending the learning day, and students receive prompt feedback on assignments.

6. Instructional Leadership (IL)

In effective schools, principals demonstrate strong leadership, especially in the areas of curriculum and instruction, and they are able to share leadership by involving other staff members in leadership activities and positions. The principal plays a crucial role in communicating the mission and goals of the school to staff, parents, and students. The principal frequently monitors progress of both pupils and programs through interpretation of test results and observation of classrooms. In addition, the principal sets high expectations for students and staff, protects the school's instructional time, and engages the staff in regular discussions of teaching and learning. Effective principals identify and utilize the skills of staff members to improve the instructional program and strengthen teaching skills. Multiple opportunities are provided for staff growth and development.

7. Home-School-Community Relations (HSR)

In effective schools, parents and the community understand and actively support the purpose of the school. The school creates many opportunities for parents to support their children's learning both at home and at school. The school uses frequent and multiple methods of communicating about learning objectives, course content, student progress, and school programs. There are opportunities for teachers and parents to meet together at parent-teacher conferences and in class meetings about the curriculum and to work together through volunteer programs. Learning time is extended and home and school are connected through assigning carefully designed and regular homework. Parents are provided with opportunities to participate in parent education programs of their choosing. Community members are encouraged to donate their time and talents to the school and community, and governmental agencies cooperate to provide support for families. The parent/community organizations are considered important by both the administration and the staff, and members participate actively in goal setting and school improvement planning.

Appendix B: Sample Characteristics

Gender?

Male	74	9.2%
Female	729	90.8%

Ethnicity?

American Indian	2	.2%
Black	248	30.8%
Asian	2	.2%
Hispanic	115	14.3%
White	426	52.9%
Other	13	1.6%

Age?

19 or less	1	.1%
20-29	168	21.0%
30-39	215	26.9%
40-49	238	29.8%
50-59	136	17.0%
60-69	42	5.3%

Education (highest degree earned)?

High School	115	14.4%
Associate Degree	63	7.9%
B.S.	407	50.8%
M.S.	198	24.7%
Ed.S.	13	1.6%
Ph.D. or Ed.D.	5	.6%

Years of experience in education including this year?

Less than 1	40	5.0%
1-2	71	8.9%
3-5	139	17.3%
6-9	127	15.8%
10-20	276	34.4%
21 or more	149	18.6%

Years of experience in this school?

1-2	239	29.7%
3-5	190	23.6%
6-9	128	15.9%
10-14	117	14.6%
15 or more	130	16.2%

What is the primary organizational pattern of your school?

Departmentalized	49	6.2%
Team Teaching	36	4.5%
Multi-Grade	86	10.9%
Self-Contained	598	75.5%
Other	23	2.9%

What is your primary job responsibility?

Classroom Teacher	402	49.7%
Special Teacher (Art, Music, PE)	69	8.5%
Chapter 1 Teacher	38	4.7%
Exceptional Education Teacher	51	6.3%
Paraprofessional/Tutor	142	17.6%
Counselor	11	1.4%
Administrator	11	1.4%
Other	85	10.5%

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Primary teaching responsibility?

Pre-K	53	6.6%
Kindergarten	82	10.3%
First grade	81	10.2%
Second grade	71	8.9%
Third grade	75	9.4%
Fourth grade	66	8.3%
Fifth grade	52	6.5%
Sixth grade	21	2.6%
Multi-grade level	205	25.7%
Not applicable	91	11.4%

How many students do you teach; i.e., class size?

1-10	62	7.7%
11-15	24	3.0%
16-20	138	17.2%
21-24	136	17.0%
25-30	227	28.3%
31 or more	107	13.3%
Not applicable to me	108	13.5%

To what degree have you been involved with your schoolwide planning committee?

None	172	21.5%
Limited	356	44.4%
Extensive	252	31.5%
Not applicable/no schoolwide committee	21	2.6%

How much teacher planning time do you have during an "average week"?

Not applicable	148	18.5%
Less than 3 hours	266	33.3%
3-5 hours	287	35.9%
More than 5 hours	98	12.3%

APPENDIX C: Successful Schools Survey for Instructional Personnel

Master Copy with Headings

In my school...

I. CLEAR SCHOOL MISSION

1. The school's mission statement is known and communicated clearly.
2. The written statement of purpose defines academic goals that focus on student learning and achievement as this school's major responsibilities.
3. Objectives in each subject area are the focal point of instruction.
4. The curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned with teaching objectives.
5. Teachers stress academic achievement as a priority for their students.
6. Teachers in all subject areas require students to be effective in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.
7. Teachers hold students accountable for clear and accurate writing regardless of the subject matter.
8. Teachers provide activities that develop critical thinking skills.
9. Materials and supplies are adequate for the students' abilities.

In my school...

II. FREQUENT MONITORING OF STUDENT PROGRESS

10. Teachers apply consistent criteria to assigning grades.

11. The results of in-class assessments are used to examine students' strengths and weaknesses and to give feedback to students.

12. Students are given specific feedback on homework and class assignments.

13. Assessment based on student performance (e.g., criterion-referenced, portfolios, etc.) occurs regularly.

14. Teachers and the principal, at least annually, thoroughly review and analyze test results to plan instructional program modifications.

In my school...

III. SAFE AND ORDERLY ENVIRONMENT

15. Students appear to believe that school rules are reasonable and appropriate.
16. Students are held accountable for maintaining school rules throughout the year.
17. Administrators support teachers in dealing with student discipline matters.
18. School staff enforce the student rules consistently and equitably.
19. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students share responsibility for maintaining discipline.
20. Students are frequently rewarded or praised by faculty and staff for following school rules.
21. The physical condition of this building is generally pleasant and in good repair.
22. Students and staff members take pride in the school and help to keep buildings and grounds clean and attractive.
23. Vandalism or destruction of school property by students is *not* a problem.
24. Property of students and staff members is secure.
25. Students treat each other respectfully and are not subject to verbal or physical abuse by other students.
26. Staff members are treated respectfully by students.
27. This building is a safe and secure place to work during the normal school day.

In my school...

IV. HIGH EXPECTATIONS

28. Most students are eager and enthusiastic about learning.
29. There is a positive school spirit.
30. Teachers base grading on students' achievement/performance rather than student behavior.
31. Teachers believe they are responsible for helping students achieve identified standards in each subject area.
32. Teachers believe that all students can achieve in each subject area.
33. In spite of students' home background, teachers feel they can successfully teach 90-95% of their students.
34. Students try to succeed in their classes.
35. Many students are acknowledged and rewarded for academic improvements and achievements.
36. Students who are not achieving are given additional help in a timely manner.
37. Low-achieving students are given the same opportunities to answer questions as other students in class.
38. Students frequently work cooperatively in small heterogeneous groups.

In my school...

V. OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN

39. The mathematics program includes concepts and activities from: number, measurement, geometry, patterns and functions, statistics and probability, and logic.

40. An expectation of our reading program is that students frequently choose to read independently.

41. An expectation of our reading program is that students frequently predict, sample, confirm, and self-correct during reading.

42. Individual/small group programs (e.g. Chapter 1, Exceptional Ed, Gifted, ESOL, etc.) are coordinated with classroom instruction.

43. The time set aside for instruction is free from interruptions (e.g. intercom, messages, assemblies, mowing the lawn).

44. Learning activities that address all learning styles are provided.

45. Students are engaged in learning activities from the beginning until the end of the instructional period.

46. Students are encouraged to express themselves through questioning and classroom discussion.

47. Students expect reteaching and specific skills remediation as parts of the instructional process.

48. Practice work following direct instruction is planned.

49. Students are offered multiple opportunities to practice new skills in both group and individual settings.

50. There are successful preventative strategies for helping students at risk of school failure.

In my school...

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

51. The principal is highly visible, making frequent informal contact with students and teachers.
52. The principal seeks ideas and suggestions from the staff.
53. Administrative leadership is available to resolve disagreements that develop among staff members.
54. Classroom observations conducted by the principal are focused on improving instruction.
55. The principal regularly gives feedback to teachers regarding their instructional techniques.
56. The principal and staff jointly plan the staff development program.
57. There is a staff development program based on school goals.
58. Follow-up assistance (materials, coaching, etc.) is provided by the administration for implementing skills learned in staff development activities.
59. The principal initiates effective coordination of the instructional program.
60. The principal is accessible to discuss matters dealing with instruction.
61. Instructional leadership from the principal is clear, strong, and centralized.

In my school...

VII. HOME/SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

62. The activities of the parent group support the school's goals.
63. The parent organization is considered important by the school staff.
64. Parents are encouraged to share ideas for school improvement with administration and staff.
65. Teachers spend more time communicating with parents about the good things students do than about the bad.
66. Most parents support school personnel when their child is disciplined for violation of rules.
67. Parents are aware of the discipline policy.
68. Parents and/or community members are frequent volunteers.
69. Parent-teacher conferences focus on factors directly related to student achievement.
70. Cooperation exists between parents and teachers in regard to homework monitoring.
71. Most parents have a clear understanding of the school's goals.
72. Most parents rate this school as superior.
73. Communication with parents is clear, effective, and frequent.
74. Most parents are actively involved.